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ABSTRACT

Two cultural characteristics may be attributed to Afro-Americans: will to survive and sense of unity. From this perspective, recommendations for establishing a collaborative relationship between educators and Afro-American parents are discussed. Specifically, recommendations focus on accommodating the learning environment to cultural differences, emphasizing self-concept development, and increasing the awareness of community resources. Concluding remarks briefly specify goals and describe sample activities for multicultural affective education for young children. (RH)

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLANNING THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM OF YOUNG AFRO AMERICAN CHILDREN

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Running Head: CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLANNING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Abstract

This paper describes two cultural characteristics that may be attributable to Afro Americans. From this view point, recommendations for establishing a collaborative relationship with parents are discussed. Goals and activities for implementing multicultural affective education in the classroom are presented.

Considerations for Planning the Educational Program of Young Afro American Children

I am special, ridicule cannot sway me

I am strong, obstacles cannot stop me

I hold my head high, proudly proclaiming my uniqueness

I hold my pace, continuing forward through adversity

I am proud of my culture and heritage

I am confident that I can achieve my every goal

I am becoming all that I can be

I am the black child. I am a child of God

Mychal Wynn (1982)

As educators address the needs of young Afro American children, it is imperative to be aware of their uniqueness as a cultural group. Acknowledging the existence of demographic and social class differences, this paper will discuss two characteristics that may be attributable to Afro Americans. From this discussion recommendations will include (a) factors to consider when working with parents, and (b) goals for implementing multicultural affective education.

The Survival Theme

Since 1619, the lives and experiences of Afro Americans have been intertwined with almost every major event in American history. In slavery, as well as in freedom, Afro Americans have served as patriots in wars, pioners, inventors, artisans, and explorers (Bennett, 1984).

In examining Afro American history it may be observed that a commonality among Afro Americans is their perseverence in surviving oppressive conditions. As slaves, the Afro Americans' strength of determination stemmed from their expression of a spiritual freedom. This spiritual freedom was nourished by the understanding that although enslaved, they retained the personal freedom to choose their attitude toward their circumstances. The Afro American chose to survive.

Afro Americans still seem to express hope for a brighter future. This sentiment is implied in their writings and music. It is demonstrated to children by the respect that is shown to the elderly.

A People United

A second commonality among Afro Americans is their sense of unity. As slaves worshipping in the bushes and fields, the "invisible church" served as one of the earliest sources for spiritual and social gatherings (Raboteau, 1980; Troy, 1972). The years following slavery, Afro Americans were united by laws of segregation and social mores. Today, Afro Americans generally live in the same communities and participate in the same schools, churches, and national organizations. Predominantly Afro American colleges, churches, and service organizations are symbols of pride. Many celebrating decades of existence, these organizations represent a nation of people who survived.

The cultural awakening of the sixties also contributed to an enhanced awareness of ethnicity. This period encouraged Afro Americans to acknowledge that they fellowship together not only because of historical circumstances but also because they share an appreciation of their culture.

Parental Involvement in the Educational Process

Educators should be cognizant of the aspirations Afro American parents have for their children. Concomitantly, parents need to feel assured that their aspirations are respected and mutual goals exist between themselves and educators. An awareness of several factors will enhance educator's efforts to communicate with Afro American parents and provide a classroom environment conducive for learning.

Accommodating the Learning Environment to Cultural Differences

Parents of Afro American children desire for their children to be known as members of a different cultural group as well as unique individuals. This statement implies that educators should be informed of research, literature, and programs which focus on the needs of Afro American children. Hale's (1982) research would suggest that the following be implemented in the classroom for optimal growth and development:

1. A family oriented classroom atmosphere. Hale's (1982) conclusions indicate that such an environment could be created by (a) heterogeneous classroom structures, (b) maximum teacher/student interaction, and (c) shared opportunities with teachers to talk in the classroom.

2. Learning activities that provide for peer interaction.

3. Increased opportunity for affective expression through music, dance, and drama.

4. Utilization of children's nonverbal communication skills.

5. Creative use of language through recitation and storytelling.

6. Maximum opportunities for gross motor activities.

7. Incorporation of African culture in the curriculum.

Plagued by inequality in educational opportunities, Afro American parents are interested in helping their children to enhance their abilities and learn the skills necessary for successfully surviving in this country. When conferencing with parents, educators should focus on the child's assets, stating specific procedures for remediating deficiencies. Curricular goals, timelines, and methods of evaluation should be shared with parents.

Emphasis on Self-Concept Development

Afro Americans are very concerned about the self-images of their children. There is a lack of adequate role models in the television media, children's books and toys. Therefore, children confront the possibility of becoming confused about the merit of

their skin color, facial features, hair texture, and cultural characteristics. Opportunities must be provided in the classroom for the expression of self-appreciation.

Awareness of Community Resources

In most predominantly Afro American communities there are churches, service organizations, youth and fine arts programs which focus on the needs and interests of Afro Americans. Not always publicized or knowledgeable to Afro Americans, educators should become acquainted with the Afro American community and the resources available for assisting children and families.

Multicultural Affective Education for Young Children

The focus of multicultural affective education for young children is on self-awareness and self-acceptance. Below are goals and sample activities that may be incorporated in the instructional program.

1. Goal: To demonstrate to children the unique contributions and talents of their family members.

Activity: Invite parents to the classroom for speaking engagements, tutoring, performing, sharing of photo albums, and participating in field trips.

2. Goal: To introduce the Afro Americans' contributions to the American culture.

Activity: The historical presence of Afro Americans in the economic and cultural growth of America should be pictorially illustrated in the classroom.

3. Goal: To acquaint children with aspects of African culture.

Activity: Introduce African folklore, songs, dances, and customs.

4. Goal: To clarify children's feelings and attitudes toward self.

Activity: Teach positive cognitive messages regarding self.

Resource: Listen Children, edited by Dorothy S. Strickland.

5. Goal: To help children develop positive self-images regarding physical characteristics.

Activity: (a) Use water color activities for children to explore the various hues of brown that may exist in their family. (b) Play verbal games associating skin color with positive stimuli. (c) Provide opportunities for children to touch, feel, and observe physical characteristics of their classmates. Encourage the sharing of positive messages about physical characteristics among children.

Conclusion

Parents and educators working together can provide an integral force in the education of young Afro American children. In addition, an awareness of their African heritage and historical contributions to America will contribute to a nation of youth who appreciate themselves, their family, culture, and country.

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